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Methods on field

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**Historical Review of Missionary Methods—Past and Present—  
in China, and how far satisfactory.**

BY

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WE are approaching the close of the half century immediately following the opening of the five ports of China in 1842. It is certainly a fitting time in which to gather up for the use of those who shall come after us the lessons of practical experience which this half century of mission work has taught us. There are left a few of the early missionaries who are familiar with the history of the work from its beginning. We have with us one—Dr. Happer—whose life of active and useful labor covers the whole period.

The theme assigned me by the committee is a very comprehensive one; indeed in its widest interpretation it embraces the whole field of missionary labor in all its departments. It is evident that I must confine myself to a limited number of topics and omit for the most part the processes by which conclusions have been reached and the arguments which they depend on for support. These conclusions, though intended to be so far as possible representative, must of necessity be largely personal. I hope that this will exculpate me from what might otherwise appear an unwarranted obtrusion of my own views. Such of my opinions as are confirmed by general agreement will certainly give a vantage ground to those who are willing to accept the conclusions of others, without spending years or a life time in working out the same results for themselves.

We are to inquire how far the missionary methods hitherto used have proved satisfactory. I am glad to believe that in the agencies employed we have made no mistakes. It is assumed in this paper that chapel preaching, street preaching, itinerations, medical missions, the distribution of books, native evangelists, pastors and teachers, native Churches and schools, are not only legitimate agencies, but that they are in fact *the* agencies which, modified by varying circumstances, must be used in carrying on the work of missions. But it still remains a question whether we have in all cases made the right use of these agencies. In answering this question the experience of the past furnishes us many important lessons.

It would be agreeable, and far from unprofitable, to dwell chiefly on the brighter features of missionary work, inquiring into the secrets and causes which have produced the grand results which rejoice our hearts to-day. But a dispassionate consideration of the more sombre side of mission work, which must include a record of mistakes, failures and disappointments, is likely to be practically of more benefit. I have at least one advantage, so far as relief from embarrassment is concerned, in the fact that the mistakes pointed out are largely my own. The object sought is not so much the presentation of my own views as the correction and supplementing of them by the views of others.

Doubtless I am giving expression to the sentiments of everyone here present when I say that one great cause of failure—so far as there has been failure—and of mistakes—so far as we have made mistakes—has been our want of *faith* and of reliance upon Divine aid and guidance. We have depended too much on man, too little on God. We have rested too much on human agencies and methods and too little on the direct power of the Holy Spirit. We have made too much of outward activities and too little of practical Christianity inwrought in our lives. There has been too much of self, too little of Christ. This has been our mistake above all others. In consequence of this we have, I believe, made the second great mistake of attempting the premature introduction of foreign methods of evangelistic work, unmindful of their inapplicability to the widely differing conditions of China. First and foremost among all evangelistic agencies must ever be,

*The Preaching of the Gospel.*—I here use preaching in its scriptural sense. It is important to bear in mind that this word in our English version of the Scriptures stands for six different words in the original Greek, only one of which, *διαλεγομαι*, closely approximates the modern meaning of the word preach. If then we take this term “preach” to represent the several words of which it is a translation, we must give it not a restricted and specific sense, but a very general one, *including* formal public discourse, but by no means *confined* to it. Conversation, teaching, the preparation of books, presenting the essence of Christianity in the concrete forms of healing the sick and relieving distress, are all preaching the Gospel, and that is the best form of preaching which is best suited to herald the good news of salvation by Christ.

Many of us come to China with the idea that a missionary's chief employment is preaching to interested and eager crowds of heathen. We are all familiar with the stereotyped pictorial illustrations of this supposed typical experience. This conception of missionary life is the instinctive outcome of our early associations and training. Oratory or some form of public speaking has been one of the great forces of our Western civilization for more than twenty centuries. We are trained to declamation from our childhood. A love of it is a hereditary passion of our race, and dependence on this mode of influencing men is a fixed habit. On our arrival in China the crowds which gather around us in visiting places not familiar with foreigners tend to confirm this preconceived idea that preaching to crowds is to be our ordinary experience. We soon find however that the natives throng around us, not so much to hear us, as to stare at us. The apparition from the unknown “outside” country is not regarded as an oracle, but as a spectacle. We soon learn that this is only an evanescent phase of mission life, and moreover that the crowds we have been addressing have in reality understood but a very small part of what we have said. In fact the Chinese, even the most cultured, are utterly untrained and unaccustomed to connected logical discourse. There is not a lecture hall in the empire. The only form of public instruction with which they are familiar is the noisy theatre, in which the actors belong to a despised class; the acting is low and artificial, and the ideas are conveyed largely by pantomime.\* The difficulty which the Chinese have in understanding our preaching is further increased by their entire ignorance of Christian ideas and terminology.

\* The Rev. T. Richard witnessed in Shan-si a most popular theatrical performance, which was a farce representing a foreign missionary preaching to a crowd of Chinese.



Their own methods of influencing their people are social and responsive, catechetical and conversational. This fact suggests the methods which we should adopt in our efforts to influence them; while they largely explain why it is that public preaching in China has not been followed by such results as were at first hoped for.

The January No. of the *Missionary Review* contains the following in an article by James Johnson, F.S.S., from which it is evident that our experience in China is not altogether exceptional. He says: "There were, when I visited India more than thirty years ago, three missionaries of the most pronounced evangelistic character—men who would have nothing to do with education, but spent their whole time in preaching in the bazaars, all of them were men far above the average in talent, devotion and piety—Lacroix in Calcutta, Scudder in Madras and Bowen in Bombay. These men spent a life time, much above the average duration, in untiring efforts to convert the natives, without succeeding in getting two or three converts to form the nucleus of a Church in these towns."

Some missionaries adhering with tenacity to other early ideas of what constitutes religious services have endeavored to add to the impressiveness of street-chapel preaching by commencing with reading a chapter from the Bible and prayer. I have myself been present at these exercises, when the natives after a noisy expression of opinions and surmises as to what the foreigner with closed eyes and reverent demeanor might be doing, went out one by one, leaving the missionary with only empty benches before him.

The practice is also not uncommon of making use of the public worship of the Church on Sunday as a means of impressing and instructing the heathen, leaving the doors open for free ingress and egress to all. Sometimes the discourse is modified so as to adapt it in a measure to both Christian and heathen hearers. The general result is that very little benefit accrues to either class. It seems to me very important that these two kinds of services should, as a rule, be kept distinct and conducted on entirely different principles. Not that Church services should ordinarily be held with closed doors and all heathens rigorously excluded. Such a course might be most impolitic, producing public distrust and suspicion. But it should be made perfectly clear by written notices at the door (explained and enforced by suitable persons appointed to receive strangers and show them the courtesy due to guests,) that all are welcome on condition that they conform to the prescribed regulations. The Mahometans in exacting reverence from every one who enters their mosques, whether in time of service or not, teach us a lesson which we may well profit by. The presence of heathen in our Church services, under the rules suggested above, may be the means of great good, without interfering with the advantages which these services are designed to confer on Christian worshippers. This matter, like all others of importance, requires much care and oversight.

Some missionaries, perhaps wisely, in order to avoid the injurious effects pointed out above, exclude even inquirers or catechumens from religious services until they receive such a degree of instruction as will enable them to participate in worship reverently and intelligently.

Another agency closely allied to chapel preaching is

*The Christian Book Store.*—To be efficient it requires a shop on a public street containing an assortment of books, general, scientific and Christian, and a quiet reception room fitted up in Chinese style.

This reception room should be provided with the conventional tobacco pipe and tea urn, and with foreign maps and pictures illustrating Western arts and customs. Such an establishment should have connected with it two, or better still, three persons, who should be men of business capacity, of social and literary culture, such as to command general respect, and last but not least having Christian sympathy and the power of ready adaptation to circumstances. It is evident that a well conducted Christian book store of this kind requires native agents with general attainments not at all inferior to the average preacher or helper. There will probably be found in most large missions persons with special gifts, fitting them for being useful in this position who would not be efficient preachers or colporteurs. The advantages claimed for book stores as compared to street chapels are, that they are always open; are accessible to all classes; are freely visited by many who will not enter a chapel; and provide for every possible variation of method in adaptation to individuals of every class and mental state. Here we have the most favorable conditions for disseminating a scientific and Christian literature, answering questions, solving doubts and suspicions; and also for conversations and discussions. Book stores have proved very useful in Shantung and other provinces, and with the advantages of past experience in improving their organization and developing higher qualifications in the native agents conducting them, may be made still more useful in the future.

*Reception of Church Members.*—Some missionaries have received converts to Church membership on their first profession of interest in Christianity, while others have kept candidates waiting for years. There have been great fluctuations of usage in this matter on the part of individuals and missions. It would doubtless be right to baptize sincere and earnest applicants at an early date, but the difficulty is in determining who are sincere and earnest. Examinations of candidates for baptism presenting a well developed Christian experience in persons just emerging from heathenism may well excite suspicion rather than inspire confidence. The man who passes the best examination may be the one least fitted for Church membership. The testimony of natives as to the private character and daily life of the applicant is of great importance, but sometimes very difficult to obtain. Experience in Shantung has led us to lengthen the period of probation. Our brethren of the English Baptist Mission have extended it from a year to eighteen months. The rule of our mission, which is very much the same in effect, is as follows:—"Except in special cases, all applicants for baptism shall be kept on probation for a period of six months after they have passed a satisfactory examination."

*Native Agents.*—Among the most important of the subjects we are now to consider is that which relates to the use of native agents. The first converts are of course brought into the Church by the foreign missionary. Afterwards the work of aggressive evangelization must be mainly through the native Christians. The millions of China must be brought to Christ by Chinamen. Hence it is the duty of foreign missionaries to make the most of native agency. These and similar expressions may be regarded as missionary axioms, as to the truth and importance of which we assume there is no difference of opinion. Here, however, we meet at once the question, "In what way shall we make the most of our native agency?"

When I arrived at Ningpo in 1854 our mission there had several natives connected with it, in whom we had great confidence as Christians,



and who had received a good deal of theological instruction in preparation for the ministry. Still (chiefly as I remember in consequence of the experience and advice of missionaries in India) these men were kept back from preaching. The rules of the mission were that they should not be sent into the country to preach, and that they should preach in city chapels only when a foreign missionary was present. Perhaps caution was in this case carried to excess; still, the exceptional experience of the Ningpo mission in the reliable character of its native agents is probably largely due to the great care taken in the selection and training of them from the first.

On the other hand it has been the practice of some of our missionaries to employ as colporteurs, evangelists and preachers all the men available, some of them soon after their baptism. In considering the question of the use of native agents our prescribed limits necessitate the most succinct and summary treatment. I shall confine myself principally to our experience in Shantung, taking up in order different topics with which native agency is closely related.

*Opening of New Stations by Resident Paid Agents.*—It was not uncommon in former years to employ recently baptized converts to open sub-stations, supplying a hired house or chapel as a centre of operations. I recall five enterprizes of this kind in Shantung, every one of which failed. I am sorry to have to add that most of the agents used were afterwards found to be unworthy men, and their connection with the Church ceased with their pay.

*Opening of New Stations by Itinerant Paid Preachers.*—This form of work has been very generally adopted and has been followed by marked results. When the natives thus employed have been carefully tried and trained, it is both legitimate and important. If, however, young converts are pressed into service with inferior intellectual and moral qualifications, and especially if the proportion used is large, so as to present to inquirers a well founded expectation of employment on a fixed salary, the question becomes a two-sided one and leaves room for difference of opinion as to whether the final result will be a gain or loss to the mission cause.

The advantages of this policy may be summarized as follows:—

- 1st.—It powerfully attracts public attention.
- 2nd.—It is calculated to draw adherents speedily and in large numbers.
- 3rd.—It detaches converts from idolatry and in most cases destroys the power of idolatrous associations and superstitions.
- 4th.—It affords special advantages for organizing companies of Christians into compact and homogenous communities and gives them defensive strength to withstand the opposition and persecution of the followers of the old religious systems.
- 5th.—It gives a firm control and authority over adherents, thus promoting outward conformity to the requirements of the Church. These advantages have certainly great weight and importance.

The policy of stimulating the growth of missions by the free use of money is carried out in Shantung to its fullest development by the Romish Church. Material advantages are offered of many kinds; tracts of land are purchased and let to Christians or inquirers to work on shares; money is invested in erecting buildings, affording employment to artisans of every kind; schools are established, giving work to teachers; men are engaged as paid preachers, as remarkable for the greatness of their numbers as the meagreness of their qualifications. I am credibly

informed that these temporal inducements are offered openly and frankly, whether with the sanction and approval of the missionaries in charge or not I cannot say. It is certain that the general impression has gone abroad through the province that a person entering the Romish Church is sure of having his temporal wants provided for and his law-suits attended to. A few persons have left our communion avowedly to improve their worldly condition.

Some of the objections to this plan are the following :—

1st.—It weakens and may even break up new stations by removing from them their most intelligent and influential members, in order to use them as evangelists elsewhere.

2nd.—It presents Christianity too much as an alien system, supplied by foreign funds and propagated for the foreigners' benefit.

3rd.—It has a tendency to attract applicants for baptism, influenced by mercenary motives, and to retain in the Church persons who seek mainly worldly advantages.

4th.—It involves the necessity of a large amount of money and a great deal of machinery and supervision.

5th.—It creates dissatisfaction and dissension in the native Church, arising from real or supposed partiality in the distribution of favors.

6th.—By appealing largely to temporal rather than spiritual motives it vitiates the character of Christianity and diminishes its power.

7th.—The worldly or mercenary element, which at first promotes a rapid and abnormal growth, is very apt to be the cause at no distant period of an equally rapid decline and disintegration.

*Establishment of Stations by Unpaid Native Christians.*—Experience in China shows that now as in the early history of the Church, Christianity may be speedily and widely propagated by the spontaneous efforts and silent influence of private Christians. Moreover, rigorous and healthy young stations require less outside influence in their development than is generally supposed. By the use of books suited to the wants of young converts, and by gathering them into classes for thorough Bible instruction (in seasons of the year when they are most at leisure) and by occasional visits from more advanced Christians and helpers, the more intelligent Church members may be well fitted for the supervision of the stations with which they are connected, and this without changing their social relations, without interfering seriously with their business and means of support, and with but a minimum of expense. During the early history of stations frequent visits from trained helpers or evangelists are of the greatest importance, provided the helpers do not remain and do the work for the young Christians, but teach them to do it themselves.

The stations formerly under my care, numbering about fifty, situated in five different *hsien* and containing about 700 converts, originated exclusively without the use of native paid agents. The condition of these stations and the character of the converts will compare favorably with those of other districts which have had paid preachers for years. I believe that a large proportion of the stations now established in other parts of Shantung originated in the same way.

It is not to be inferred from what has been said above that I would discourage all use of paid preachers. On the contrary I think the course which I advocate presents the best methods for selecting and training a more efficient class of them than can be obtained otherwise. It gives time for testing the qualifications of the converts; it leaves the more able and useful of them to develop and strengthen their stations



and to prepare others to take their places when they are called elsewhere. It takes for granted that we do not transfer any man from the position in which he has been called until we have good evidence that God has called him to another sphere of labor. The transference from one position to another may then be made gradually; these men being used at first only when their time is least valuable at home. The question of the preacher being paid by the native Church or by foreigners we have not now time to consider. Among the rules adopted by our own mission with regard to the selection and employment of native agents are the following:—

II.—“No one shall be employed by the mission as colporteur or helper, who has not been at least three years a professing Christian, unless in exceptional cases to be determined by three-fourths of the mission.”

III.—“No one shall be employed by the mission as a colporteur or helper who has not shown zeal for Christian voluntary labor for the spiritual good of his own family and neighborhood.”

XI.—“No one shall be *hired* to do occasional evangelistic work in his own neighborhood.”

*Organization of Churches.*—As Presbyterians, we from the beginning of our work in Shantung were impressed with the great importance of ordaining elders (as we understand the word elders) in every Church. This we proceeded to do as early as possible. We found however that those who were at first inducted into this office were from intellectual and moral unfitness a hindrance rather than a help to the stations with which they were connected. We are now proceeding more cautiously in the formal organization of Churches, waiting until we have men who to some reasonable degree possess the requisite qualifications for the eldership. We have now nineteen Churches organized with native elders. In the larger proportion of our stations we adopt a simpler form of organization, which may be regarded as initiative and tentative, placing over each station one or more leaders, assisted and superintended by helpers (now principally licentiates). These helpers have charge of groups of stations under the general supervision of the foreign missionary. Our English Baptist brethren adopt in the main the same plan.

*Theological Classes and Native Pastors.*—Twenty years ago our Presbyterian mission organized a theological class, composed of eight members. We hoped that this would initiate a new era of growth and progress. After a three years' course of instruction as careful and thorough, probably, as had been given to any such class in China up to that time, they were licensed to preach, and two of them were soon installed as pastors. One of them was not long afterwards put out of the ministry and excommunicated. The other is still a respected member of the Presbytery, and was moderator at our last meeting. He found after a few years' experience that the pastoral relation established between him and his people was equally distasteful and unprofitable to both parties. About ten years ago he reverted to his old occupation as a farmer, preaching in the little chapel in his village and occupying very nearly the position among the Christians in his neighborhood that our leaders do in other stations. Six years ago another theological class was formed with seven students. After finishing the prescribed course of study they were licensed. Most of them were graduates from the Tung-chow-fu college, and are men of decided ability and promise. None of them have, up to this time, been advanced to the pastorate, and there seems little disposition on the part of the Churches to call them. As yet in the English Baptist

and our missions, comprising together a membership of about 4,000, we have not one pastor in the modern sense of the term. I may state here that my colleagues regard me (and justly) as being chiefly responsible for what we now unite in thinking the premature organization of the first theological class. Our third theological class has just closed its first year of study. We believe that the instruction communicated will tell powerfully on our future work, though not probably in the way at first anticipated.

This historical review would be incomplete without more special reference to the record of the paid agents who have been connected with our mission. I leave out of consideration entirely those who have entered our service within the last ten years. Previous to that time we had employed in Tung-chow and Chefoo, including the first theological class, fourteen persons. Of these six have been excommunicated, four have been dismissed as unsatisfactory, one has died in the service of the mission and three still continue in its service. In other words more than one third have been excommunicated and five-sevenths either excommunicated or dismissed. It must be added that the statistics of our mission at Chinanfu and of the American Baptist Mission at Tung-chow-fu are still less satisfactory. There are other missions in the North and South, whose experience has not been very different from our own. I am glad to know that there are some missions in China in which the defections of native agents have been very few, and probably there is not another place in which they have been so numerous as in Shantung.

There must of course be some failures, but there have been too many, more than enough to constitute an emphatic warning to proceed cautiously in this matter. We are endeavoring to profit by the lessons of the past, and we believe that our future statistics will present a better showing. It must at the same time be acknowledged that the men who have fallen away from our list of preachers seemed at first to be earnest and exemplary, and that they commanded the fullest confidence, not only of those with whom they were specially connected, but for the most part of all who knew them.

I may say in general that all our missions in Shantung—the American and English Baptist, the American Presbyterian and the Inland Mission—are agreed as to the importance of making our Churches self-supporting and self-propagating. The only difference of opinion is as to the way in which this desirable result is to be brought about. So far in advance of all the rest of us, as scarcely to be willing to acknowledge us as belonging to his school, is the venerable Dr. Crawford of Tung-chow-fu, who carries the theory of complete independence of pecuniary aid to its extreme limit. Others hold to the principle of self-support in different degrees.

Rules adopted by our mission looking toward the independence and self-support of our native Churches are construed, so as to admit of considerable variation in practice in accordance with individual opinions and different circumstances and localities. It is generally understood that this subject requires further experience and the use for the present of methods both flexible and tentative. In the matter of self-support for theological students the success of the English Baptist Mission is most encouraging. Their students receive no monthly stipend, and even their expenses for food during their course of study is only in part paid by the mission; while it is clearly understood that after their studies are completed no employment or support whatever is guaranteed. With us in



the Presbyterian Mission, our students with their families are nearly all of them dependent on the mission when they enter the class. We have found it necessary to continue their stipend during their course of study, and continued support is expected after the term of instruction is finished.

*Denominationalism.*—It remains for us to inquire how far the spirit of denominationalism has injuriously affected our mission methods, and whether mission work must be conducted on into the indefinite future on the same fixed denominational lines. The question of introducing into China the differences and dissensions of the Churches of the West confronts us, and it is for us to consider solemnly whether this is the work, or any part of the work to which the Master has called us.

I do not believe that hitherto the divisions of Protestantism have wrought so much evil as some suppose. This Conference is only one of the many evidences of our essential unity and fraternity. It furnishes us also an occasion and an organization for fostering and increasing this unity. In this early stage of work in China the influence of missionaries preponderates over that of the native Christians. The evil effects of denominationalism have not yet had time fully to develop. But there is no reason to fear that these evils will be greatly increased when denominational differences are more clearly defined; when natives shall have the ascendancy, and perhaps exaggerate their differences, in order to find sufficient grounds to justify their divisions; unless happily they are led to see that these divisions are indefensible, and take early measures to rid themselves of the fetters with which we have encumbered them.

The rise of different denominations of Christians in the past was perhaps largely excusable, or even wholly justifiable. Questions of doctrine had to be decided, on which it was but natural (and also desirable for the elimination of error) that earnest minds should take sides. Practical questions of policy could only be settled by a long course of trial and experience. Has not this experimental process gone on long enough, and is it not time to gather up and utilize the results? We are not to throw away the lessons which past conflicts of opinion have taught us. In the doctrines and usages so tenaciously held by the different bodies of Protestants there is much in each that is worth conserving and contending for. Would it not be possible to select and combine the excellencies of all? Missionaries in foreign lands have special advantages for doing this. We are comparatively untrammelled by old associations and prejudices. There are many in the home lands beset with difficulties which are the growth of centuries, who have their eyes turned to us as the ones who should take the lead in this new departure. Notwithstanding our insufficiency to cope with the obstacles which such an undertaking presents, I believe God is ready to give us the needed wisdom and guidance if we attempt this work in His name. Our responsibility in this matter we cannot evade or relegate to our successors. We all believe that Christianity is the regenerating force which shall fit China to be a power for good as one of the leading factors in the future of the world's history. It is largely for us to determine whether the Church of the future shall be a divided Church, or the Church for which Christ prayed; presenting in her unity the proof of her Divine commission, securing through obedience the presence of her Divine Lord, going forth to the spiritual conquest of the world, "fair as the moon, clear as the sun and terrible as an army with banners."

